

ABERDEEN CITY COUNCIL

COMMITTEE	Education & Children's Services
DATE	26 November 2024
EXEMPT	No
CONFIDENTIAL	No
REPORT TITLE	Riverbank School Excess Capacity Options
REPORT NUMBER	F&C/24/329
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR	Eleanor Sheppard
CHIEF OFFICER	Stephen Booth
REPORT AUTHOR	Andrew Jones
TERMS OF REFERENCE	1.1.1; 1.1.2

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 This report provides an assessment of the options available for making use of anticipated excess capacity at the new replacement Riverbank School building, which is expected to open in Spring 2025.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

That the Committee:-

- 2.1 Approves the proposal to relocate the Autism Outreach Service from the Ashgrove Children's Centre building, and to establish an Early Intervention Space at the new Riverbank School building, as outlined under Option 3 at Appendix 1 of this report.
- 2.2 Instructs the Chief Officer – Corporate Landlord to continue to monitor pupil numbers and use of space at the new Riverbank School building and to provide updates on any further action required in the future, through the annual School Estate Plan update reports.

3. CURRENT SITUATION

- 3.1 The planned new replacement building for Riverbank School is currently under construction, and is due to be completed in Winter 2024/2025, after which it is expected that pupils and staff at the existing Riverbank School will transfer to the new school building.
- 3.2 When plans for the new school building were first taking shape in 2017, the pupil roll at Riverbank School had reached 392, which was close to the school's maximum capacity of 420. School roll forecasts at that time indicated that pupil numbers at the school would continue to rise rapidly, with the roll predicted to exceed 500 by 2022. It was therefore agreed that the planned new Riverbank School building would provide additional pupil capacity, to meet the anticipated demand for school places. The new building has therefore been designed to provide an increased capacity of 651 pupil places.

- 3.3 Since the size of the new school was determined in 2017, pupil numbers at Riverbank School have begun to reduce significantly year on year. This is thought to be due in part to changing demographics within the Tillydrone community, which is served by Riverbank School.
- 3.4 For example, in 2017, the pupil roll forecast for Riverbank School indicated there were just over 100 five-year old children eligible to enter the P1 year group the following year. In 2024, birth rate figures provided by NHS Grampian show that the number of five year old children living in the Riverbank School catchment area has dropped to 76, and the numbers are expected to continue to fall, with just 52 five-year old children expected to be living in the catchment area for entry to P1 in 2028.
- 3.5 Due to these unexpected changes, the School Estate Plan, approved by the former Education Operational Delivery Committee in September 2022, highlighted the expectation based on updated forecasts at that time that pupil numbers at the school would not exceed 413, and that as a result there would be excess unused capacity within the planned new school building. Officers were therefore instructed by the Committee to carry out an options appraisal on potential uses of the additional capacity to be provided by the new building.
- 3.6 Since the instruction in 2022 for the options appraisal to be carried out, pupil numbers at Riverbank School have continued to drop. Currently there are 308 pupils enrolled at the school, and the latest school roll forecast indicates that numbers will fall below 300 from 2028, if the recent factors which have led to the decline in pupil numbers continue. The new school building is therefore expected to have a significant amount of spare capacity, at least initially after opening. Based on the school's class configuration for 2024/25, there will likely be eight classroom spaces which are surplus to requirement, when the school moves in to the new building in 2025.
- 3.7 The options appraisal has therefore focused on identifying potential uses for some of these surplus classroom spaces, to help ensure the new building can be utilised as fully as possible, and to minimise any unnecessary costs. A summary of the options available is presented at Appendix 1 of this report.

Retaining Flexibility

- 3.8 Whilst some of the options presented within Appendix 1 would require the use of most or all of the eight excess classroom spaces in the new Riverbank School building, officers have been mindful of the need to retain flexibility in the building, so that some of the spaces could be put into use as classrooms at short notice.
- 3.9 This may be required if there is an unexpected increase in pupil numbers within the school's catchment area, for example, or should pupil numbers at other nearby schools reach their capacity in the future, requiring spaces at alternative schools to be identified for families moving in to the wider area.

- 3.10 There is also the possibility that the new school building will appear more attractive to parents, compared with the existing school building, and this could have an impact on the numbers of children attending the school in future.
- 3.11 In recent years, there has been a significant number of pupils each year who live within the Riverbank School catchment area, but whose parents have chosen to enrol them at other schools in the city, rather than at Riverbank School. Ahead of the start of the current school session, a total of 40 children who live within the Riverbank School catchment area, and who might therefore have been expected to be attending Riverbank School from August, were instead enrolled at other schools. When combining the numbers of children living in the Riverbank catchment area who have enrolled at other schools over each of the past five years, the data shows that there are over 130 children across the P1 to P7 year groups who are currently zoned to Riverbank School but who are instead attending other schools.
- 3.12 Given that these children continue to live within the Riverbank School catchment area, their parents would have the right to request a place for them at the new Riverbank School building, and they could do this at any point in the school year. If just a proportion of these children were to move back to Riverbank, this may require additional classrooms in the new Riverbank School to be opened up at short notice.

Conclusion and Preferred Option

- 3.13 Considering the above, it is recommended that some of the surplus classrooms are left unoccupied initially, to allow them to be put back into use as classrooms at short notice, should this become necessary.
- 3.14 The preferred option identified in the options appraisal at Appendix 1 is therefore Option 3 - to use four of the surplus classroom spaces in the new Riverbank School building to accommodate the Autism Outreach Service, which would relocate to Riverbank from its current base at the former Ashgrove Children's Centre building, and which would use existing resource to operate a new Early Intervention Space from Riverbank, to provide specialist support to pupils with additional support needs from schools around the city. Children would remain on the roll of their own school and attend the unit at Riverbank to develop strategies to allow them to cope better in their mainstream school.
- 3.15 This proposal is in line with the findings of a separate report from the Education Psychology Service, due to be presented to the Committee on 26 November 2024, which recommends establishing an early intervention space at Riverbank School, as a test of change for supporting pupils across the city, and working and learning collaboratively from this.
- 3.16 A cluster of four classrooms within one part of the new Riverbank School building has been identified as potentially suitable for use by the Autism Outreach Service. An existing door in the corridor adjacent to these rooms would provide them with natural separation from the rest of the school, along with secure entry and exit to / from the unit. The classrooms are also adjacent

to a secure garden area which would serve as an outdoor learning space for pupils attending the unit.

- 3.17 If the preferred option is approved by the Committee, this would mean that the four remaining surplus classrooms in the new school building would remain surplus to requirement initially. These rooms would be split between the middle stages and upper stages wings of the school, and not assigning a specific purpose to them would ensure that flexibility is retained, should there be a significant increase in pupil numbers after the new building opens, which requires new classes to be created. In the meantime, the school would be able to make temporary use of these rooms for other purposes, to the benefit of pupils and staff.
- 3.18 It is therefore recommended that the Committee approves the proposal to relocate the Autism Outreach Service to the new Riverbank School building, and to establish a new Early Intervention Space within the building. Work would then be undertaken over the remainder of this school session to make the required minor changes to the building, plan the relocation of the service and how the new intervention space will be operated, and to identify pupils who would benefit from attending initially. It is anticipated that the service and intervention space would commence operation from the Riverbank building from August 2025, and it is recommended that the unit is established initially for a trial period of two years.
- 3.19 Given the fluctuations in the pupil roll at the school over recent years, it is also recommended that officers are instructed to continue to monitor numbers and use of space in the new building, and to provide updates on any further action required in the future, through annual school estate plan update reports.

4. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 If the recommendations in this report are approved by the Committee, the cost for the relocation of the service, estimated at approximately £5,000, would be covered by existing revenue budgets. The cost of the minor reconfiguration of the building layout required to accommodate the service will be incorporated within the overall Riverbank School capital project. The additional cost implications will be considered by the Chief Officer – Capital, in consultation with the Chief Officer – Corporate Landlord.

5. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 Section 1 of the Education (Scotland) Act 1980 provides that it shall be the duty of every education authority to secure that there is made for their area adequate and efficient provision of school education.
- 5.2 Section 17 of the Education (Scotland) Act 1980 provides that it shall be the duty of an education authority in the performance of their functions under sections 1 to 6 of the Act, to provide for their area, sufficient accommodation in public schools and other educational establishments under their management to enable them to perform their said functions.

5.3 Under the Education (Additional Support for Learning) (Scotland) Act 2004 every education authority must make adequate and efficient provision for the additional support required by each child or young person having additional needs. The recommendations of this Report addresses these duties.

6. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

6.1 There are no direct environmental implications arising from the recommendations of this report.

7. RISK

Category	Risks	Primary Controls/Control Actions to achieve Target Risk Level	*Target Risk Level (L, M or H) *taking into account controls/control actions	*Does Target Risk Level Match Appetite Set?
Strategic Risk	No significant risks identified			
Compliance	No significant risks identified			
Operational	Identifying alternative use for all surplus spaces in the school building could remove any flexibility in use of space should pupil numbers begin to increase	Adopting the recommended option would ensure some space in the school remains available, should more classrooms be required at short notice.	L	Yes
Financial	If no action is taken to make alternative use of any of the surplus space, the overall efficiency of the building would be reduced, and overall running costs for the building would be unnecessarily high. The extent to which best value can be achieved from the Council's investment in the	Adopting the recommended option would provide alternative use for some of the surplus space in the school, helping to reduce any inefficiency and helping to achieve best value for the capital investment in the building.	M	Yes

	new Riverbank School building would also be negatively impacted.			
Reputational	If no action is taken to make alternative use of any of the surplus space, there is a risk that the Council would be seen to be not making best use of its assets.	Adopting the recommended option would provide alternative use for some of the surplus space in the school, helping to ensure the new building can provide maximum benefit to learners.	M	Yes
Environment / Climate	No significant risks identified			

8. OUTCOMES

Council Delivery Plan 2024	
Impact of Report	
<p>Aberdeen City Council Policy Statement</p> <p><u>Working in Partnership for Aberdeen</u></p>	<p><u>A City of Opportunity</u></p> <p>Policy Statement 2 - Review and invest in our school estate, ensuring all of Aberdeen's schools are fit for the educational needs and the challenges of the 21st century. The report seeks Committee's approval of a proposal to make best use of surplus space at the new Riverbank School, to meet the needs of pupils from across the City.</p>
<u>Local Outcome Improvement Plan 2016-2026</u>	
<p>Prosperous People Stretch Outcomes</p>	<p>The proposals within this report support the delivery of all Children & Young People Stretch Outcomes 3 to 8 in the LOIP. The paper seeks approval to establish an early intervention unit which will help to meet the needs of pupils with additional support needs, which will ultimately help them to achieve successful outcomes.</p>
<p>Regional and City Strategies</p>	<p>Making best use of the available space will support the delivery of the Council's Property and Estates Strategy.</p>

9. IMPACT ASSESSMENTS

Assessment	Outcome
Integrated Impact Assessment	New Integrated Impact Assessment has been completed
Data Protection Impact Assessment	Not required
Other	N/A

10. BACKGROUND PAPERS

- 10.1 Education Operational Delivery Committee, 8 September 2022: [Agenda Item 14: School Estate Plan 2022](#).
- 10.2 Education Operational Delivery Committee, 26 November 2024: Behaviour Action Plan Report

11. APPENDICES

- 11.1 Appendix 1: Options Appraisal

12. REPORT AUTHOR CONTACT DETAILS

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